

Thank you for inviting me....I don't want to take up a lot of your time, but I hope you will give me a few moments to talk from my heart about this very important day.

Memorial Day started right after the Civil War.....far away in southern Illinois.....when a Union general and Republican Congressman named John Logan had a unique idea: make May 30th a day when Americans set aside their work and remembered their war dead by placing flowers on their graves.

Logan said the Civil War had changed America forever. He said that for the first time, the war dead lay in the cemeteries of virtually every town and city in the land.

He had seen so much suffering in the war, and understood human nature well enough, to know that individual soldiers would soon be forgotten unless a special effort was made to remember them. He called his idea...Decoration Day.

Like many veterans, Logan was a remarkable figure. He was personally torn by the strife in America. Representing the southern tip of Illinois, Logan and many of his friends and political supporters were naturally sympathetic to the South. But Logan also felt a loyalty to the nation, and surprised many when he came out in favor of the union.

Someone who realized the importance of Logan's choice was a fellow Illinoisan who was soon the President of a divided country. And when Abraham Lincoln took office, he saw to it Logan got his wish to raise a regiment and command it in the field.

By the end of the war, Logan had been severely wounded in battle, had visited Lincoln in the White House, and was considered so able, he was a candidate to lead an entire army corps under Sherman and Grant.

Following his service, he was returned to Congress, and he died suddenly in 1886, probably of complications from his war wounds.

By now, of course, American has forgotten about John Logan and what he did for his country. That is also becoming truer each year of the event he helped create, which we now call Memorial Day.

Today, too many Americans think of Memorial Day as three words instead of two: three words such as "Memorial Day Sale" or "Three Day Weekend."

It did not help when Congress passed the Uniform Monday Holiday Act in 1968, forever moving Memorial Day from May 30 to the last Monday in May, encouraging the nonchalant observance we see today.

But today is not about finding a good deal on a wide screen TV, or focusing just on barbeque and beer. It's a day of reflection, remembrance and respect.

1.3 million Americans have died in war since the first shots were fired at Lexington and Concord. If we started reading those names on New Year's Day, one every four seconds for ten hours each and every day, we would finally be approaching the end of the list today.

Think of that: New Year's, Valentine's Day, Spring Training, Passover and Easter, and the entire month of May....and we would still be reading right now.

Many of us here today would recognize a few of those names, because they were people we knew, people who were with us in moments of great peril.

But they didn't survive.

Maybe it was just bad luck, or a momentary mistake, or a silly accident, or inexperience, or because our orders were just bad, or maybe...maybe it's because one or two of them did something in a moment of heroism and sacrifice that was over in an instant. Maybe the result is that you and I are still here, and they are not.

That does happen.

People die for each other.

I don't know...every story is different.

But I do know four names and faces I won't forget. Young men who were young with me in Vietnam, and who died in the jungles. Men who in my mind will always be young...who never got the chance to grow any older.

I'd like to read their names now.

Clayton Martin

Duane Cordiner

Billy Bennett

Merle Adams

I don't know how often anyone says those names out loud any more, or how many people still remember them, but I am certain the names are spoken less and are remembered by fewer every year.

If Memorial Day is about anything, it is about giving those names...those brave, lost human beings...the respect and attention they deserve. It's about remembering the suffering of their

parents, brothers and sisters, friends, maybe even their wives and children, and acknowledging that their suffering never ended.

I'm grateful that I am here today to say their names again: Clayton, Duane, Billy and Merle.

I'm so terribly sorry they died.

America is a great country, one that is worthy of such pain and loss.

It might be too much to ask anyone who hasn't been through war to understand how fortunate we are, and I would never wish war on anyone as the price for understanding.

I know for a fact that when in danger, and in moments of great fear and anxiety, soldiers everywhere place their faith in Almighty God, whose purposes are often unknown to us. In the midst of war, Lincoln said:

"I have desired that all my works and acts may be according to his will, and that it might be so, I have sought his aid. Even if I fail, I must believe that for some purpose unknown to me, he wills it that way."

"If I had had my way, this war would never have commenced; if I had my way the war would have been ended before this, but we find it continues. We must believe he permits it to continue for some wise purpose of his own, for we cannot but believe that he who made the world still governs it."

For myself, there were many times then and even today when I rely on faith, rely on my trust in the Lord, and not on my own limited understanding. In Isaiah, the Lord says: "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my right hand."

So now it is up to for us and our families, and the ones who follow us, to gather like this, to strengthen and uphold each other in grief, and in the solemn pride we feel for the sacrifice so many veterans have made at what Lincoln called "the altar of freedom."

It's good to see you all here. I consider it an honor to have been invited to speak. Thank you very much

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